

statues of its age—its creed—its character—its home. But is ancient Greece modern England? In what does our religion—our literature—our climate—our life resemble it. Those who would retain the architecture, should retain the dress. The whole thing is a falsity—an imposition—a palpable lie—an absurdity; and for the encouragement of this, our professors award medals. Do they cavil at those who would revive Gothic, or Norman, or Elizabethan? They do. I have heard, myself, just and severe sarcasms, those very words indeed, levelled against the revival of either of these styles, by the very men who would revive a style antecedent to them by centuries, and foreign to our land. Sir, I do not expect you will care to publish this. My words are strong; but I feel strongly, deeply, degradingly, the want of true art among us, be it in Gothic, or Byzantine, or Italian, or Egyptian, or Grecian, or Roman, for all seem practised. I see with sorrow and disgust, bad copies, senseless revivals, false construction, and wretched taste. Sir, no new style can be born in a year, nor fifty, nor may be, a hundred. But surely the medals might be awarded to the explorers of art, in preference to the imitators—the clever imitators of the past. But we must expect nothing else—it has ever been so.

We live, however, in a Protestant country—Protestant against the trammels of any unreasonable authority. We live among an energetic and persevering race—a nation of thinking men. May we not hope with Mackay, that—

"There's a good time coming?"

It is truly a consummation devoutly to be wished. KUNOPS.

#### TASK-WORK AMONGST BRICKLAYERS.

In your journal a short time since I perceived an article on task-work, signed "A Plasterer," in which was very truly described the evil consequences arising out of the system; but I can assure your correspondent that his is not the only trade in which the system is practised, and I would refer him to his next door neighbours, the bricklayers. To such an extent is task-work, or sub-letting, carried on in that trade, that not only is the trade much injured, but the life and limbs of those employed, and in some instances of the public, are placed in jeopardy. Scarcely a week passes over our heads but we hear of the fall of arches on some railway, and the tumbling down of houses which are being built. In most cases the elements are blamed for the accidents—the wind, the wet, &c.; of course these delinquents cannot be punished for their wild freaks; occasionally inquiries are made in respect to the workmanship, but that is invariably decided in favour of the contractors; it is very difficult to judge of the workmanship in a heap of ruins, and yet one might come to a speedy conclusion, that if the workmanship was of a good kind the ruins would not have been there.

I will endeavour to make a few remarks on task-work as it is practised in our trade. A man who is not over particular as to the language he uses to his men, generally takes this work of a contractor at a very low price; he then procures two or three men of the same stamp as himself; these men receive 6d. per day above the usual wages, and are usually called "drivers;" one of them is put to work on a line with four or five other men, and as each man has an equal portion of the work to perform, the object of the driver is to ruin his piece along as quickly as possible, paying very little regard as to how it is done; but should another man, who is not used to scamping his work, be a little behind with his part, the line will at once be struck on him, and he will be discharged as incompetent to do his work. On most large jobs, such as railways, an inspector is employed, whose duty it is to see that the work is done properly; but as he cannot always be at one place, having other parts of the railway to attend to, every facility is afforded to carry on the scamping system; and in his absence a quantity of labourers are employed in throwing in the bricks, without any regard to the order of bond or any other order, except that of putting them out of sight. A good look-out is always kept for the inspector; and should a hat or a coat, or anything like the aspect of the supposed party be seen in the

distance, the joints are flushed up, the labourers take to their beds, and things go on pretty well till the inspector goes, when the old plan of proceeding is again commenced.

Incredible as these facts may appear to those of your readers who are not acquainted with these matters, they will be no less astonished at the plan which is adopted by these task-masters to force, as it were, their men to spend their wages. On task-jobs, where a considerable number of men are employed, the task-master gets a number of round pieces of tin of two sizes; they are usually stamped with his initials; the smaller size is equivalent to a sixpence, and the larger to a shilling. The task-master then enters into a contract with some public-house keeper, and orders him to supply his men with whatever refreshment they require on the production of this tin money. The publican allows the master 2s. 6d. for every sovereign he receives in this way; therefore, considerable pickings are made. I need not add, that refreshments purchased in this way are usually of the worst description. Not satisfied with the advantage he derives by this abominable system—this demoralising evil—the master almost always contrives to keep his men waiting for their money till nine or ten o'clock on a Saturday night, with what view it is unnecessary to say.

Can nothing be done to prevent these evils? Such a system ought to be held up to universal reprobation; but it seldom happens that these proceedings meet the eyes of those who would be disposed to lay them before the public; none but those who are actually engaged in doing this work are witnesses of it. I saw something in THE BUILDER some time ago about the incompetency of mechanics: it is likely, when the majority, or I might say almost all the large jobs in and around London, are task-work, that we should have competent mechanics? No, Sir; for when a man gets into such a system of working as is practised on these jobs, it is not very easily departed from.

I think, Sir, by giving publicity to these facts, good may be done, for it would open the eyes of those who are in the habit of building; and I think that railway companies and other parties who have extensive works in progress, by being initiated into the mysteries of task-work, may be led to adopt a remedy.\*

A BRICKLAYER.

#### RAILWAY JOTTINGS.

THE autumn rains are still, as heretofore, revealing the humiliating fact that sufficient estimation of their power and extent has by no means always been taken into account in the planning and construction of our railway works. The disruption of culverts, the fall of bridges, and the sweeping away of embankments, have been but too frequent of late, as on the Trent Valley, the Lincoln, and other lines of railway.—Near the Wolverhampton station of the Shrewsbury and Birmingham and Stour Valley line, a bridge, recently constructed over a canal, suddenly gave way, and fell into ruins on Monday week. The centre had been removed more than a month before, and no crack or other appearance of instability, it is said, had been noticed prior to the fall. The span of the bridge was between 40 and 50 feet.—A mail-train engine, on Friday last, fairly crushed into wreck the brickwork abutments of one of the numerous wooden bridges near Collingham, on the Nottingham and Lincoln line. The engine, however, may be said to have leaped over the chasm, but the coupling chains snapped, and the carriages rebounding were driven with a crash on each other, and, after rocking dreadfully, fell into the flood beneath. The coupées were crushed into 'fire-wood,' and every carriage and van smashed, but happily the train contained not a single passenger, and, strange to say, no one seems to have lost his life.—Mr. Bracey, the contractor, has entered into arrangements with the Caledonian Company to work that line, and to advance the sum of 200,000l. on the security of its rolling stock.—Several Companies have issued advertise-

\* I have heard on good authority that, from information which was forwarded to the clerk of the works of a large task job, now in progress about four miles from London, he has condemned and taken down upwards of 70 rods of brickwork.

ments inviting public competition in the supply of stores and materials. The result of this system, says *Herapath*, is the saving of many thousands a-year in money, and the repair of morals by the riddance of jobbing.—The following important decision was given by Lords Brougham and Campbell, in the House of Lords, in the matter of the Forth Marine Insurance Company:—"Dividends are supposed to be paid out of profits only, and when Directors order a dividend to be paid where no such profits have been made, without expressly saying so, a gross fraud is practised; and the Directors are not only civilly liable to those whom they have deceived and injured, but are guilty of a conspiracy for which they are liable to be prosecuted."—An appeal by the London and North-Western Company has been heard before the special session at Manchester, against a rate demanded by the overseers of Barton-on-Irwell, on a portion of the old Liverpool and Manchester line. The case was decided against the Company, on the ground that they did not apply in reasonable time. The amount assessed on the railway, which only occupies 42 acres of bog land, is 2,000l., or one-fifth of the entire rate levied on the township for the 1-25th part of it occupied by the railway. The land was purchased by the Company at 40l. per acre, and the Directors had consented now for nineteen years to pay nearly as much annually as the purchase cost originally; the former being at the rate of 34l. per acre per annum.—On Wednesday week, the wires of the telegraph between Birmingham and London were broken in two different places, by contraction produced by frost.

#### ANCIENT MORTAR.

On reading a day or two ago the works of Codinus, "De Originibus Constantinopolitanis," I met with a passage which may be interesting to your readers. I am not aware that the precise composition of the mortar used by the ancients, concerning which, on account of its wonderful hardness, so much has been said, is known to modern architects and builders; but it seems to me that the following conveys a hint which, in proper hands, may produce results very useful to the public.

The Emperor Justinian built the temple, which was dedicated to St. John the Baptist, and he employed upon it no less than ten thousand workmen, with one hundred masons, or over-lookers. "Five thousand men were employed upon the right, and five thousand on the left of the building, and every effort was made that it might be completed as soon as possible. An angel revealed to the emperor during sleep the form which the temple was to assume. There was a certain workman who had acquired great renown in building temples. He boiled in large pots a quantity of barley, and mixed the liquor *πύρεν ἀσβέστης* *καὶ τοῦ σιδήρου*. Whether the first means what we now term *asbestos*, I am unable to determine; the second I take to be powdered shell. The barley-liquor he mixed warm with these things instead of water. They cut up also some elm bark, and mixed it up with the asbestos, and made a kind of paste (*καὶ ἰσχυρὸν πύρεν*), which was applied neither too hot nor too cold, but tepid, because it adhered the better, and made the stones stick together with the strength of iron."

The above passage between inverted commas is a literal translation from the Greek. I shall be obliged if any one of your readers will inform me what the word *ἀσβέστης* as here used really means. A. G.

ART-UNIONS IN AMERICA.—A controversy, which appears to excite great interest, is going on in New York, between the *Home Journal* and the *Mirror*, concerning the constitution of the "American Art-Union." In this association the pictures are all purchased by a committee; and Mr. N. P. Wallis, in the first-named paper, is maintaining that the position and character of artists have been materially lowered by this mode of proceeding. He asserts that the society has been made "into a throne of personal consequence, by which artists can be tyrannised over, and true art discouraged."